

First president of Austin Tri-Hawk, John Newman, dies in Tennessee

Written by George Browning

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John R. Newman

Long-time employees of Austin Tri-Hawk Automotive Inc., friends and admirers of John Richard Newman, the factory's first president, are mourning his recent death.

Newman, 68, died on Saturday, October 27, in his adopted home state of Tennessee.

He was born in England on February 16, 1944. His family moved to Canada when he was six years old. He attained the ranking of Queen Scout in the Boys Scouts of Canada as a youth, and he spent ten years in the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment of the Canada Militia.

Newman completed tool and die training at Westcox in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada. He was employed as a draftsman with Outboard Marine and then moved to the United States while employed by Magna International. He served as that company's general manager of plants in Canada, Maryland and Iowa. He then became plant manager of A.O. Smith in Milan, Tn., and sales manager for Karmaster International.

He came to Austin before the new plant that would house Austin Tri-Hawk Automotive was built and was present at its ground-breaking in 1997. He served as president of the ATA plant until December, 2004, overseeing its rapid growth and the construction of its first addition. While ATA president, Newman was also an active supporter of Austin schools, community groups and organizations. He was admired by many as an astute, knowledgeable leader who always took time to talk with employees and direct his skills toward solving problems.

When he left ATA, Newman served as vice president of Nipon Oil in Childersburg, Al., before taking the plant manager's job at ARJ in Jackson, Tn. He retired from that position in 2011 to enjoy his family, friends and horses at his country home near Trenton, Tn.

Newman served as Senior Warden of St. Thomas the Apostle Episcopal Church in Humboldt, Tn., and he was chairman of the committee that was rebuilding the church's Free Will Shelter. His friends and co-workers recalled that Newman was a man who thoroughly enjoyed life. Aside from his beloved horses, he was active in woodworking, travel, cooking and singing.

Newman was preceded in death by his parents, Mary and James Newman.

His survivors include his wife, Sandra Davis Newman; a son, Scott and his wife Shannon Newman of Amhersburg, Ontario, Canada; a daughter, Krista and her husband Robert Farnum of Eddyville, Ia.; a brother, James Newman of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada; five grandchildren, Scott Jr., Paul, Danielle and Ryan of Canada and Mika of Iowa; and two great-grandchildren, Mikalah and Aleigha Newman.

A memorial service was conducted on Thursday, November 1, at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Jackson, Tn. Memorial gifts may be sent to Saint Thomas Episcopal Church, 6 Esquire Lewis Road, Humboldt, TN 38343.